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AUTHOR	LeRoy, David J.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

During the gavel-to-gavel coverage by public television of the Watergate Hearings of the Select Committee on Campaign Practices, audience makeup and attitudes in Florida were surveyed and profiled. Findings showed that blacks were attracted in greater proportion than whites, and males more than females. Spanish-speaking persons tended to avoid the telecasts. Exposure to college education increased the probability of watching. One-third of those watching were new to public television. While some persons were repelled by the extensive coverage, the survey showed that full coverage attracted two persons for every one it repelled. The survey findings are summarized in six tables. (Author/SK)

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PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWER AND WATERGATE HEARINGS *

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Dr. David J. LeRoy
Director
Communication Research Center

Dr. C. Edward Wotring
Associate Director
Communication Research Center

College of Communication
The Florida State University

Dr. Jack Lyle
Director
Communication Research
Corporation for Public Broadcasting

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On April 19, 1973, NPACT (National Public Affairs Center for Television) announced it would provide gavel-to-gavel coverage of the hearings of the Senate Select Committee on Campaign Practices, soon to be dubbed the "Watergate hearings."

Shortly thereafter the nation's 234 public television stations were polled concerning their preference for live daytime presentation or delayed video tape broadcast during the evening hours. The decision was for a delayed presentation starting at 8 p.m. Eastern time.

Some East Coast public television stations, including WNET in New York and the Eastern Educational Network, carried live coverage of the hearings as well as the evening rebroadcasts during the first sessions. This daytime coverage on public television ended with the recess of May 24, 1973.

It was soon apparent that the commercial networks were also interested in telecasting the hearings. Shortly, with considerable fanfare, CBS and NBC announced that they would transmit the hearings live throughout the first session.

While examples of what has come to be called "television of record" or "journal of record" are common place in the history of public television, the Watergate hearings promised to become a media extravaganza. One was continually confronted with allusions to prior hearings as carried by the commercial networks. Thus, there was talk of the Army-McCarthy and Kefauver hearings. Little mention was made of the fact that public television, through NPACT as the primary producer of special events programming, had provided a number of telecasts

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within this genre. For example, they had telecast the 1972 Republican convention gavel-to-gavel. In addition, they had provided coverage for Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings, Presidential addresses, U.N. debates on Red China's admission, and a number of Senate confirmation hearings.[1] However, the Watergate hearings were most assuredly the most publicized and anticipated hearings of recent times.

Thus, coverage of the hearings fell into a well-established pattern of public affairs reporting by NPACT and public television. If anything was unusual about the presentation of the hearings on public television, it was not that they were shown video taped and in prime time, but the sheer extensiveness of air time devoted to the hearings.

Television of Record

There may be some doubt as to the rationale behind NPACT's use of television of record. For example, it could be argued that public television went to this type of coverage--gavel-to-gavel, uninterrupted, uninterpreted coverage--to avoid political criticism from the United States Congress and the Nixon Administration. After all, a significant portion of the funding of national programming on public television comes from Federal appropriation. On the other hand, NPACT may have felt that this was the best way to serve the public. Whatever the motivation for using television of record, it would seem beneficial to examine, without prejudice, this concept on its merits.

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Television coverage of this type is based on a philosophy worthy of more extensive examination than is possible here.[2] Certainly gavel-to-gavel coverage does not seek to replace either journalistic enterprises or news summaries which are edited reports of an event.[3] Television of record is seen as an adjunct to, not the supercedent of, the journalistic enterprise. This type of coverage is essentially experiential, if not existential. The individual in most instances must view, interpret, and collate unaided his perceptions of the event as captured by the television cameras. The inherent drama of the "promised" revelations and contradictions to be forthcoming by the Watergate witnesses certainly functioned as a psychological lure for the initial viewing of many people. Whether there was sufficient drama to hold and maintain viewing levels during the long sessions to come was another issue, especially for the public television presentations which had to compete with prime time commercial network attractions.

Essentially the hearings were presented by public television in a slightly modified version. The tapes were usually introduced by the anchormen Robin MacNeil (in the early stages) and Jim Lehrer.[4] The introduction was succinct and essentially non-evaluative. The content of the day's hearings was then summarized briefly, hour by hour, with the names of the witnesses appearing on the screen and a brief verbal resume of the substance of their testimony. At natural breaks throughout the program, three minutes were set aside for announce-

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ments by the local public television stations. During these breaks, forthcoming programs were announced and in some cities solicitations for donations were made to the Watergate viewer.[5] At the conclusion of the day's hearings, often in the early hours of the morning, NPACT correspondents and a number of guest experts discussed the salient and relevant parts of the day's testimony. From time to time the correspondents, MacNeil, Lehrer and, later, Peter Kaye, offered observations and commentary on the day's events. However, the commentary was in addition to the complete rebroadcast of the entire committee session.

Feedback From Viewers

Throughout the first week or so of the hearings which began on May 17 and continued on May 18,22,23, and 24, an appeal was made for viewer evaluative reaction to the uninterrupted gavel-to-gavel coverage being provided by NPACT via PBS and the local public station. Viewers were asked to send their opinions to a special post office box number in Washington, D.C. Also, those viewers of day-time live Watergate on the Eastern Education Network were invited to send their reactions to a different box number. The response was overwhelming. Of the letters received, 70,023 were favorable and laudatory of public television's prime time Watergate telecasts. An additional 573 letters expressed negative evaluations of the Watergate hearings. It is difficult to estimate the number of letters that

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came in from the daytime Eastern Educational Network viewers, but one guess placed them at less than 300.[6] If this feedback can be used as any indication, PTV seemed to attract a large audience which was very favorably disposed toward the complete rebroadcasts.

Ratings and National Picture

By the end of the summer almost nine out of every ten adults in the country had watched some of the hearings on television, according to the Gallup Opinion Index.[7] Gallup reported that only 12% of those interviewed in August said they had not watched any of the hearings, 70% had watched some of the live broadcasts and 29% had watched some of the rebroadcasts. If we can assume that respondents interpreted 'rebroadcasts' to mean the evening showing on public television and not excerpts on the evening news, this would indicate that almost one out of three adults did use public television's delayed presentation.

More direct evidence is provided through the television ratings for the period. A compilation of the Nielsen ratings for the period May 17 through August 3 showed that the total audience for the PBS presentations reached as high as an estimated seven percent of all television households, or four-and-a half million homes.[8] In that two-and-a-half month period, the evening audience of the hearings on public television never fell below 3.2%, or two million television households. These figures were achieved despite the fact that public television is not available to perhaps 25-30% of the homes. Further, a considerable

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number--as many as 40--of the 236 stations decided not to run the hearings.

As might be expected, there was considerable variation from one session to another, reflecting in large part the prominence of the witnesses appearing. John Mitchell was the 'star' witness, drawing a total audience of 4.5 million on July 11. John Haldeman was next, drawing a total audience of over four million homes on each of the three full sessions at which he testified, July 31, August and 2.

The quarter-hour figures show that the audience generally peaked in the period between 10 and 11 p.m. Serious attrition did not seem to occur unless the evening's hearings ran on past midnight, at which time the rating began to diminish.

Individual market data for the May 17-24 hearings give more indication of what the hearings did to the public television audience. Of eight markets detailed for the five evenings during which the hearings were shown, the ratings for every market showed an increase every evening compared to the same night of the week prior to the hearings. In most instances, the ratings doubled at the least and in some instances the increase was dramatic. For example, in Boston the May 23 average half-hour estimate was a rating of 6.8%, compared to 1.2% on the last Wednesday prior to the hearings. In San Fransicso the May 24 hearings drew an average half-hour audience of 5.0% whereas the comparable evening viewing for the pre-hearing period was 1.2%.

Telephone coincidental studies were also conducted in Boston, Dallas/Ft. Worth, Denver, San Francisco and Washington, D.C., during the first two rounds of hearings. The data from these

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CPB-sponsored studies generally paralleled the trends shown by the Nielsen ratings and the Florida data.[9]

By the end of the first round of hearings, public television's share of the Watergate audience appeared to be stabilizing. Of those who had watched any of the hearings, the percent of those who had done at least some viewing on public television ranged from 16% in Washington (where the public station, WETA, suffers the handicap of a UHF allocation) to 40% in Boston (home of one of public television's oldest and strongest stations, WGBH, Channel 2).

PTV Watergate and Florida Audience

Throughout the spring of 1973 the Communication Research Center of Florida State University had been investigating the effects of a state-wide public television series, TODAY IN THE LEGISLATURE, which provided coverage of the 1973 Florida state legislative sessions. When the Watergate hearings began, a number of special state-wide surveys were conducted attempting to ascertain audience reaction to the hearings. Since time and funds were limited, the surveys concentrated on four 'major' PTV areas: Jacksonville, Miami, Tampa/St. Petersburg, and Tallahassee. It was felt that these four areas were of sufficient mix to adequately represent the diverse political opinions of the State of Florida. The northern Florida cities represent somewhat traditional "Deep South" attitudes. The urban Miami area represents both an old-line liberal community as well as containing Cubans and a variety of retired populations. Much the same can

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be said for the Tampa/St. Petersburg cities which are growing urban centers in the state with a large number of retired persons.[10]

Sampling for each area was proportionate to market size determined by recent American Research Bureau rankings. The use of cross-indexed telephone directories allowed telephone numbers to be randomly selected proportionate to the size of telephone exchanges by area. Since two of the market areas, Miami and Tampa/St. Petersburg, had substantial Spanish-speaking populations, interviewers fluent in that language and its dialects were retained.

Interviews were conducted during three time periods. The first period or wave extended from May 17 to May 24, during the time which the committee heard from Odle, Kehrli, Shoffler, McCord, Caulfield, Alch and others. The second wave was from June 5 to June 7 during which time the committee heard from two principal witnesses, Sloan and Porter. More important, the commercial networks now began to rotate their live daytime coverage of the series.[11] The third wave began on July 25 and ended August 6. These hearings dealt essentially with the testimony of Erlichman and Haldeman and a variety of other star witnesses. The committee then recessed for the remainder of August.

During the first wave of interviews (may 17-24), 770 completions were obtained for an approximate completion ratio of 75% when adjusted for disconnects and not-at-homes. During the second wave of interviews, June 5 through June 7, there was a completion rate of 69%, for a total of 201. The completion rate for the third wave of interviews, July 25-August 6, was 76% with

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495 usable responses.

The combined total of respondents for this survey was 1466. Appropriate examinations of demographic distributions reveal no major departures from recent census figures except for a disproportionately large number of females in the sample. Where appropriate, sufficient controls are introduced to ascertain the possible impact of sex upon the findings.

Essentially the surveys reported here sought to discover who regularly viewed public television's Watergate telecasts. As shown by the Nielsen ratings, in comparison to other public television programming, Watergate no doubt represented a substantial "hit." Still it should be borne in mind that Watergate did not result in a massive defection from commercial television's prime time audiences. Rather, in comparison to the typical commerical television fare offered, public television's Watergate hearings could be an active rather than passive viewing choice. Certainly the choice to watch either an exciting detective or action adventure versus Watergate was to choose between the psychologically exciting or the physical. Some may argue, of course, that the difference between the "capers" represented on commercial television's detective adventure stories and those revealed, for example, in the area of Watergate burglary do bear a remarkable similarity from time to time.

The following discussion seeks to describe who watched Watergate on public television. It extends and amplifies in many ways an earlier, preliminary report of this data.[12]

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VIEWING PATTERNS

During the first series of interviews, 52% of the Florida sample reported no viewing of the hearings, whereas during the second series the proportion not viewing dropped to 43%. Toward the end of July and early August, only 34% of the sample reported viewing no Watergate.

/Table 1 About Here/

Comparing the distribution among three waves, the viewing pattern can be summarized as an initial flurry of interest, and a severe dip when the hearings resumed and the commercial television networks began to rotate their telecasts. By the time the final wave was introduced the committee and its hearings dominated the summer scene news for some eight weeks. The findings from this last interviewing wave confirmed what is obvious, almost two-thirds of the July-August 1973 sample reported some exposure to the hearings. Also, as can be seen in Table 1, approximately one-third of the sample who had watched at one time by now had ceased viewing the hearings.

The third wave of interviews are perhaps of more interest since it is the sample that can best reveal the effects of telecasting the hearings for both the commercial audience and the public television networks. Thus, from time to time, a detailed analysis will focus upon this group.

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As can be seen in Table 1, the proportion of public television viewers began at 19%, dropped to eight percent during wave two, and rose back up to 11% during the last wave of interviewing. A similar pattern emerged for commercial television viewers: 29% viewed commercial television during the first wave, 13% during the second wave, and 23% during the third phase.

Thirty-six percent of the second sample reported that they had watched during the earlier interviewing period but had now ceased to view. For wave three, the percentage of those reporting cessation of viewing was 32%. These crude indices indicate that the rotation of coverage by the commercial networks, initiated shortly before the second wave of interviewing, did have some effect on the size of the commercial audience, marked by an approximately drop from 29% to 13%. However, this decline in viewing was also represented in public television's audience shrinking from 19% to eight percent from wave one to two. These findings have several possible explanations. First, the brief recess and the return to regular programming may have had some effect, breaking the viewing habits. Perhaps more important, the witnesses for this second round of hearings were minor Republican campaign officials such as Harmony, Reisner, Sloan, Tresse, and Porter. Finally, the commercial networks had begun their daytime rotation coverage of the hearings, thus providing audiences with alternative programs.

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Demographic Variables

Since those who did watch at least some of the hearings were roughly evenly divided between those who had used public television for some of their viewing (53%) and those who had watched only commercial channels (47%), it is of interest to contrast these two groups.

Education. Generally, studies of the audience of public broadcasting have suggested that its audience is drawn in disproportionately large numbers from among those who have gone on to college. The present data showed in terms of overall viewing of the hearings, 50% of those who had not finished high school did view compared to 45% of those with high school diplomas, 55% of those with some college and 56% of those who had finished a college degree.

The relationship of education to viewing on public television, however, was influenced by age, as can be seen in Table 2.

/Table 2 About Here/

Age. Our overall findings for viewing related to age showed a slightly curvilinear distribution with those under 30 and those over 60 being more likely to view than those in the intervening age categories.

A perusal of the age data suggested a cutting point at age 40, which was close to the median age of the sample and also was the group where viewing of the hearings was least

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likely. Thus making a two-way comparison between those above and below 40, with and without some college education allowed a simultaneous exploration of these two variables.[13] As seen in Table 2, there was a mild interaction ($X^2=25.63$; df=6, $p<.003$). Among those who did not go beyond high school, age increased the likelihood of viewing whereas the opposite was true among the college educated. Further, among the high school group, age was related to a higher likelihood of viewing on commercial television whereas among the college educated the older persons were much more likely to watch on public television.

Sex. While education perhaps increased respondent's interest in news, age may have had an effect due to more time and resources available for viewing. But another explanation could be sex differences. Women tend to be at home and have more access to television than men during the day when the hearings were being shown on commercial television. The pattern of the data for all three waves of interviews revealed few substantial differences between women and men. Both showed some interest in the initial phases, but interest dipped among both sexes as the second round continued. By the end of July, 70% of the males and 40% of the females reported some viewing of the hearings.

/Table 3 About Here/

Table 3 presents data from the last wave of interviews, with age and sex controlled. The relationship is complex.

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Initially there did not seem to be any substantive viewing difference between the sexes. But the introduction of a number of controls revealed that the public television presentations were more likely to be viewed by men than by women of like age and education--with one exception, women over 40 who had some college education. This group contained the heaviest users of public television for the hearings. Otherwise, women tended to view more commercial telecasts of the hearings than did men, no doubt for the obvious reasons of available time and access mentioned above.

Having some college education made a difference in overall viewing for women of both age groups whereas among men the positive relationship between education and viewing was present only among the younger, under 40, group.

When the data were further refined to differentiate heavy or regular viewers from light or irregular viewers, the differences remained.[14] Among women with some college and over 40, 64% viewed on public television and of this group 78% were regular viewers. Among the younger college educated women only 25% said they watched on public television but of these, 92% were regular viewers. Much the same held for heavy versus light viewing among those who watched on commercial television.

The implication of these data is that there was a substantial core of heavy, regular viewers and a smaller group of light, irregular viewers. Discussed elsewhere is an

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extended consideration of the differences between the wave one and wave two samples whereby the impact on viewing patterns of the introduction of rotation by the commercial stations is traced.[15] By the time of the last wave of interviews, late July, the effect of rotated coverage on the commercial channels had no doubt taken effect among the women.

/Table 4 About Here/

Table 4 serves to remind us that generally men did view more than women, particularly on public television. By the end of July the audience did appear to have "settled in."

Race. There were some interesting findings in terms of race. The Spanish-speaking respondents, located in both Tampa/St. Petersburg and Miami, avoided the hearings while blacks were relatively heavy viewers. Only 27% of the Spanish-speaking people reported watching even one Watergate hearings, in comparison with 61% of the blacks and 51% of the whites. This finding held up across three waves of interviewing. Thus, in wave one only 29% of the Spanish-speaking respondents viewed Watergate, 13% during the second wave, and 30% during the third wave. Among blacks, 57% viewed during wave one, six percent during wave two, and 78% during wave three.

The blacks constituted the largest ethnic group watching public television's coverage. Thirty-five percent of the blacks classified themselves as regular viewers on public television compared to 27% of the whites and ten percent of the Spanish-

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speaking people.

Other PTV Viewing

Before turning to issues dealing with the psychological orientations of the respondents, it might be beneficial to consider the public television viewing habits of the sample in areas other than Watergate, as well as some related issues of viewer attraction or withdrawal because of Watergate coverage. During the final interviewing period a number of special questions were inserted into the interview schedule. Special care was taken to insure that prior to these questions the respondent did not know for whom the survey was being conducted.

First, 47% of the sample reported no public television viewing, 44% of the sample reported viewing some other public television programming, and eight percent reported being unable to receive their local public television station.

Two issues of interest were:

How many new viewers were attracted to public television by the hearings?

How many viewers were driven from public television by the hearings?

In terms of new viewers, 34% of public television's viewers of Watergate reported that they had not watched public television before the hearings. Of the new viewers, 81% reported that they viewed the hearings at least twice a week on public television.

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Still, the bulk of those who watched the hearings on public television were drawn from its regular audience. For example, 61% of those who said they normally watched public television weekly and 50% of those who said they watched it daily were in the Watergate audience, in contrast to only 35% of those who had infrequently or never watched public television before. However, 73% of the casual, occasional viewers of public television said they were now regularly watching the hearings on public television.

Self-designated public television viewers were asked: "Are you watching public television more, less or about the same?" Most, 58%, said their viewing was unchanged while 18% said they were watching more, 23% said they were watching less.

Of those who said they were viewing more, 94% attributed the increase to Watergate.[17] Of those who said they were watching less, 65% blamed Watergate. While the size of the sample in these cells is quite small and, hence unstable, further analysis of the data suggested (not proved) that a majority of the group now viewing less public television were those who preferred music and drama.[18]

When we compare the number of those watching Watergate on public television who said they had never watched public television before with those who said they were now watching less public television, the tentative conclusion is that public television was attracting two new viewers via the hearings for each former viewer being driven away. While the new viewers

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were of an unknown quality, it appeared that the majority of the lost viewers used public television primarily for music and dramatic entertainment.

Coorientation

This section applies coorientation criteria to opinions of Republican and Democratic voters towards Watergate issues. An attempt is made to differentiate the types of Watergate viewer (public television, commercial television, and non-viewer) using these criteria. Finally, the most important of the coorientation criteria, accuracy, is analyzed in terms of its relationship with media use variables.

Coorientation, a methodology developed by Chaffee and McLeod[19] for evaluating communication systems at various levels of complexity has been increasing use in the past few years.[20]

Basically, the method measures the attitudes towards a particular object held by each of two individuals, plus each individual's estimate of the other's attitude toward that object.[21] For example, we could determine Republican and Democratic opinion toward President Nixon, as well as Republicans' estimates of Democratic opinion toward President Nixon, and Democratic estimates of Republican opinion toward President Nixon. The three basic coorientation concepts are examined by comparing these opinion estimates. These comparisons are diagrammed in Figure 1.

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/Figure 1 About Here/

Agreement is the extent to which Republican actual or reported opinion is similar to Democratic actual or reported opinion.

Congruency (perceived agreement) is the extent to which each party thinks the other party agrees with them. Thus, we compare Republican actual opinion with Republican estimates of Democratic opinion. To the extent these measures are the same, congruency is present for Republicans. The same comparison is done for Democrats.

Accuracy, the most important of the coorientation concepts in terms of implications for communication,[22] is determined by comparing each party's estimate of other party opinion with actual other party opinion. Thus, for example, if Republicans estimate that Democrats dislike President Nixon, and in fact Democrats do dislike President Nixon according to their actual opinion, we would say the Republicans were accurate in their estimation.

In this study during the third wave of interviewing Republican and Democratic voter attitudes, and estimates of other party attitudes, were measured on two important Watergate related issues: Whether or not President Nixon had advanced knowledge of the Watergate break-in or cover-up, and secondly, the extent to which the news media had been biased against President Nixon in their Watergate coverage.

Accuracy assumes information gathering through communication, and has been shown to directly relate to amount of information gathered about another's position.[23] Obviously, it would be difficult to predict another's attitude correctly without having some kind of communication activity in which information is collected about the other's attitudes. Therefore,

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our basic hypothesis is that the greater the interest in Watergate, as indicated by viewing it, the more the information gathering about it; thus, the higher the accuracy. Further, the greater the amount of general media usage, the more information a person is likely to have received concerning other's opinions of Watergate; thus, the greater the accuracy. Further, those voters in 1972 who maintained their support of McGovern in the face of desertions by fellow Democrats, should be enjoying Nixon's Watergate plight. We know Democrats are more likely to view Watergate.[24] Thus, given their interest, they should be more accurate than Republicans. Finally, the audience attracted to the public television telecasts in the evening would seem to be demonstrating more interest than their peers who chose instead to view prime-time commercial television. Again, we would then predict more accuracy on the part of the public television viewer than either the commercial Watergate viewer or the non-viewers.

Procedure

Basic coorientation data were gathered as follows. First, each respondent was asked his opinion on two Watergate issues of central importance. One issue concerned whether or not President Nixon had advanced knowledge of the Watergate break-in or cover-up. Alternative responses to the advanced knowledge issue were: 1) had advanced knowledge of both break-in and cover-up; 2) had advanced knowledge of cover-up only; 3) unsure; and, 4) had advanced knowledge of

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neither. The second issue to which each individual responded dealt with whether or not the news media had been biased against President Nixon in their coverage of the Watergate affair and the cover-up. Possible responses to the media bias issue were as follows: 1) media was not biased; 2) media was a little biased; 3) unsure; and, 4) media was definitely biased. Next, each respondent was asked to estimate how Democrats would answer each question, then how Republicans would answer the same question. Thus, for each respondent three answers on each issue were obtained: his own opinion, his estimate of Republican opinion, and his estimate of Democratic opinion.

In order to group responses for each question into actual Republican and Democratic voter opinion, each respndent was asked at the end of the questionnaire for whom he voted in the 1972 presidential election. This process was used to group Republican voter estimates of Democratic opinion, and Democratic voter estimates of Republican opinion.[25]

Four groups of opinions are then distinguishable for each question:

1) Republican voter opinions R, towards issue X, or RX

2) Democratic voter opinions D, towards issue X, or DX

3) Republican voter estimates of Democratic opinion toward issue X, or R (DX)

4) Democratic voter estimates of Republican opinion toward issue X, or D (RX)

As previously shown in Figure 1, comparisons among these groups of opinions produce measures of the three

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coorientation concepts: agreement, congruency, and accuracy.

Analysis

Initially, all coorientation concepts were applied to the data to determine overall patterns of response among Democratic and Republican voters on each issue, and to test the hypothesis that Democratic voters would be more accurate. To do this, means were computed for each response group for each issue. Results of these computations are shown in Table 5.

/Table 5 About Here/

Following Chaffee and McLeod,[26] a mixed-model analysis of variance was calculated for each issue; then, selected comparisons were tested. In all cases, two-tailed tests were used.

Results

The results of the mixed-model analysis of variance on each issue are reported in Table 6. Cell means have already been reported in Table 5.

/Table 6 About Here/

Both analyses of variance show a significant trial F-ratio. Trial constitutes the repeated measures factor and in this case refers to the measures of one's own opinion and estimate of another's opinion across voter groups (Republican

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and Democrat). Thus, significant difference between own opinion and estimate of other's opinion for each issue indicates a lack of congruency. Condition here constitutes the independent measures factor, and refers to one's voter group--Republican or Democrat. Thus, the significant trial by condition interaction F-ratios indicate that for both issues, the discrepancy between own opinion and estimate of another's opinion, or the amount of congruency, differed for Republican and Democratic voters. Inspecting the direction of these differences suggests that for both the advanced knowledge issue and the media bias issue, Republican voters perceive more congruency than Democratic voters; i.e., Republican voters think Democrats are closer to their own position as compared to the Democratic voters' perception of how far Republicans are from their position.

Selected comparisons were computed to determine agreement, and more importantly, accuracy.

The actual mean opinion of the Republican voters on the advanced knowledge issue was 2.67, whereas the Democratic voter mean was 1.69. These means were significantly different ($t=7.42$; $df=312$; $p<.001$), indicating that Democratic voters felt Nixon had more advanced knowledge of the Watergate break-in and cover-up than did Republican voters. Thus, the voting groups do not agree. The same was found for the media bias issue. Here Democrats perceived significantly less bias in the news media toward President Nixon in its coverage of the Watergate affair and cover-up than did Republicans ($t=4.22$; $df=312$; $p<.001$).

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Of central concern here is accuracy. It was predicted that because the McGovern Democratic voters should have a greater interest in Watergate, they are more likely to watch the hearings than Republican voters both on commercial and public television; thus, Democrats should be more accurate than Republican voters in estimating other party opinion. In order to test this, for each issue two t-tests were computed: one between Republican voter mean estimate of Democratic opinion and Democratic actual mean opinion, and the second between Democratic voter mean estimate of Republican opinion and actual mean Republic opinion. Comparing the t values and inspecting direction and amount of each difference would demonstrate which group was more accurate.

On the advanced knowledge issue, there was a significant difference between Republican voter estimates of Democratic opinion and actual Democratic opinion ($t=2.70$; $df= 312$; $p < .01$). There was no significant difference between Democratic voter estimates of Republican opinion and actual Republican opinion. Inspecting the means (Table 5), it is clear that Democratic voters, as predicted, are more accurate than Republican voters in estimating other party opinion.

On the media bias issue, however, both groups were equally inaccurate. Both t values were significant, and inspecting the means shows both estimates were about equal in the amount of discrepancy from the actual other party opinion.

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Thus the hypothesis is supported for only one of the issues.

A possible explanation for these results is that the media are less likely to give coverage of opinions about its own bias as it is of opinions toward President Nixon and his involvement in Watergate affairs.[27] Since less information is available on the media about opinions toward media bias, the fact Democratic voters watch more than Republican voters would not help them make better estimates. Thus, neither group would be expected to be accurate, which is what was found.

Viewing Type and Accuracy

In order to test our other hypotheses concerning the relationship between various media use variables and accuracy, different analytic procedures were employed.

It was necessary to determine if accuracy related to other variables, such as amount of Watergate viewing. In order to do this, each respondent was categorized according to how accurate he was in estimating his own party and other party opinions on the advanced knowledge and media bias issues. First, actual Republican and Democratic voter opinion was determined for each issue; then, each respondent's estimates of these opinions were compared to the actual opinions. These procedures are described below.

Each respondent had given his own opinion on both issues. These own opinions were grouped according to for whom the respondent voted in the 1972 Presidential election. Non-voters were dropped from the analysis. Given Republican and Democratic voter opinions on each issue, the most frequent

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responses or modal values were selected to represent actual opinions of Republican voters and Democratic voters on each issue.

Recall that each respondent, regardless of his voting preference in 1972, had made four estimates: what was Republican opinion on the advanced knowledge issue, what was Republican opinion on the media bias issue, what was Democratic opinion on the advanced knowledge issue, and what was Democratic opinion on the media bias issue.

Each estimate was in terms of the answer that the particular party in general would most likely give, or predicted modal responses. Thus, each respondent estimated four opinion modes.

To categorize each respondent according to how accurate he was, his four estimates were compared to the actual modal responses described above. The number of correct estimates were then tallied for each respondent who could receive a score of 0 to 4. Respondents were then categorized as accurate estimators (3 or 4 correct, N=110); mixed estimators (2 correct, N=76); or, inaccurate estimators (0 or 1 correct, N=129). These categories were then cross tabulated against other variables to determine if relationships existed.

Democratic voters were significantly more accurate than Republican voters as predicted (X^2=16.7; df=2; $p < .002$).

It was hypothesized that viewing of Watergate should be related to accuracy. This was supported, although not as

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strongly as expected. There was a larger percentage of accurate estimators among Watergate viewers (public and commercial television) than among non-viewers of Watergate (X^2=7.44; df=4; p=.10). The amount of Watergate viewing was likewise marginally related to accuracy. A greater proportion of accurate and mixed estimators was found among light viewers than non-viewers (X^2=7.88; df=4; $p < .10$).

It was predicted that greater news media use would effect accuracy. This was found only for viewing the daily local 11:00 p.m. television news.[28] Of those respondents viewing three or more local newscasts a week, a greater percentage were accurate estimators than among those viewing less than three local newscasts. In turn, infrequent viewers (less than three newscasts a week) composed a larger percentage of accurate estimators than the non-viewers(X^2=10.02; df=4; $p < .04$).

Finally, it was hypothesized that viewers of Watergate on public television would be more accurate than commercial or non-viewers. This direction exists in our data, but non-significantly. However it was found that frequency of viewing public television in general was related to accuracy. Among the accurate estimators, 51% viewed public television weekly compared to 44% of the mixed estimators and 35% of the inaccurate estimators (X^2=11.75; df=6; $p < .07$).

It would appear that use of the local television newscasts and public television viewing, and to a lesser extent, viewing of the hearings on television, relate to accuracy of

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estimating Republican and Democratic opinions on Watergate issues as hypothesized. Aside from the information gained about others' views from the media, possibly those individuals who were interested in local news may also have been those who were active locally in civic clubs and public affairs. As such, they would be more likely exposed to other Democrats and Republicans and hence be better equipped to estimate those viewpoints.

Attitudes Toward Watergate Issues

Five opinion items were included in all waves to further determine any differences among public television viewers, commercial viewers, and non-viewers of the hearings. Each item was presented in the form of a statement, to which the respondent was asked to agree or disagree (no opinion, however, was allowed).

The first item was : "I am tired of the whole Watergate affair, and wish it would just go away." During wave one, 79% of the public television viewers and 74% of the commercial viewers disagreed that Watergate should go away, as compared to [illegible]% of the non-viewers. By wave three the same pattern of responses was evident although slightly fewer respondents in each viewing group disagreed that Watergate should go away. Here, 70% of the public television viewers, 61% of the commercial viewers, and 44% of the non-viewers disagreed. This pattern, stable across all waves, clearly demonstrated that those viewing the hearings were less likely to report being tired of the hearings or wanting them to "go away," as compared to non-

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viewers.

A second question dealt with the fairness of the Senate Select Committee. Approximately 62% of the wave one viewers, both public and commercial television, agreed that the Committee was fair, while only 42% of the non-viewers expressed this agreement. By wave three the percentages had dropped slightly in all cases (from 62% to 56% for hearings viewers, and from 42% to 39% for non-viewers) but the pattern holds. Thus, viewers are less likely to perceive the Senate Select Committee as biased than non-viewers.

A third item concerned whether or not respondents felt CBS and the Washington Post had been biased against the administration because of their Watergate coverage. Public television viewers were more likely than commercial or non-viewers to disagree that there was bias against the Nixon administration. Half of the public television viewers, as compared to 47% of the commercial and 36% of the non-viewers during wave one, felt there was no bias. By the time the wave three data was collected, the commercial and especially the non-viewers had become more unsure while public television viewers remained about the same (47% disagreeing with the statement). Only 27% of the non-viewers disagreed that there was bias, while 54% were unsure, and 37% of the commercial viewers disagreed, with 41% now unsure. Thus, it appears that viewers of Watergate perceive less bias in CBS and the Washington Post than non-viewers. Among viewers, those watching public television are the least likely to perceive bias. Also apparent is a general growing uncertainty among

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respondents concerning news bias of CBS and the Washington Post towards the administration as the hearings continued through the summer.[29]

A fourth question dealt with Nixon's subordinates: "President Nixon has been lied to by his subordinates concerning Watergate." Approximately 44% of the sample agreed with this statement during wave one, and this figure remained fairly stable across all waves, with 42% agreeing during wave three. Viewing the hearings on commercial or public television did not show a relationship with responses to this statement. The only observation was that by wave three public television viewers were most willing to take a stand one way or the other on the issue (23% unsure), followed by commercial viewers (28% unsure), and last, non-viewers (38% unsure).

A fifth item stated: "I am glad we have a President who can be hardnosed and clever when he has to be." This item was intended to tap dogmatic support of Presidential activities. Watergate viewers were less likely than non-viewers to agree with this statement. During the first wave of interviews, 47% of the viewers as compared to 58% of the non-viewers agreed with the statement, and public television viewers were more likely to agree than commercial viewers (51% and 45% respectively). In wave three, commercial and public television viewers were equally likely to agree (47%), and less so than non-viewers (54%).

Two additional items were constructed and included in the last wave of interviewing. The first question asked whether or not respondents agreed that President Nixon's refusal to give tape recorded information to the Senate Watergate Committee was an admission of his involvement in the affair. Commercial viewers were the most likely to agree with the statement (38%), followed by public television viewers (33%), and last, non-viewers (24%).

The second special question constructed for wave three stated, "The testimony of Nixon's former aides John Erlichman and H.R. Haldeman has convinced me that Nixon is innocent and that John Dean lied." Haldeman had not yet testified when this wave began; however, when his testimony started, his name was included in this statement. Public television viewers were most likely to disagree with the statement. Sixty-three percent of the public television viewers disagreed, followed by 54% of the commercial viewers, and 38% of the non-viewers. It should be pointed out that the non-viewers did not agree with the statement or disagree--47% were unsure, as compared to 30% of the commercial and 26% of the public television viewers. Thus, public television viewers seemed unimpressed by Erlichman and Haldeman, while the non-viewers were thrown into confusion.

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SUMMARY

The telecast of the hearings was a landmark event in the history of American television. While others will dwell upon the political ramifications of the event and the possible reactions of the voters, the part played by public television in the event is modestly documented here.

The evening telecasts by NPACT marked perhaps the most substained prime time coverage of an event in the history of noncommercial television. The hearings themselves required from the viewer sustained attention and interest to grasp the importance of the ebb and flow of the events. While some events were more momentous than others, the slow accretion of minute points would swell throughout the hour; hour by hour, the drama forever cerebral, although mundane at times, held for many a fascination not matched by competing commercial prime-time television.

The Florida surveys studied in depth who watched the hearings, although one suspects that each state could have revealed a similar story. In summary, we found that the hearings attracted a varied audience. The PTV telecasts attracted and held blacks in greater proportion than whites. The Spanish-speaking individuals tended to avoid the telecasts. Males tended to watch more than females. Exposure to some college education increased the probability of watching, the exception being older college women, who tended to view with almost addictive dedication.

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When the public television viewing behavior of the audience was considered, it was discovered that one-third of the Watergate hearings respondents were new to public television. When the number of people who were repelled by the excessive Watergate coverage was assessed, it was discovered that the hearings roughly attracted two viewers for each viewer it repelled.

Public television attracted a wide variety of viewers to the hearings. Yet as a group, they differed both from the commercial television viewer and those who have not watched Watergate. Public television viewers seemed more ready to face the difficult issues involved with Watergate, whatever the outcome of the hearings. They were more willing to take a stand on issues-- more solid in their opinions. Most importantly, perhaps, was the great amount of trust public television viewers expressed for the Senate Select Committee, the media, and the press.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Information is drawn from a file of NPACT press releases and interviews with personnel at NPACT during August, 1973. We would like to thank Phyllis Franck for her help.

2. Drawn essentially from an interview with Jim Karayn, President of NPACT, and individuals at the public Broadcasting Service. Students of the documentary--film or television--no doubt have benefited conceptually from exposure to the hearings by reference to the earlier film POINT OF ORDER of about ninety minutes drawn from about two hundred hours of kinescope film of the Army-McCarthy hearings.

3. Issues related to journalism as an act of creation, process, and, alas, bias, are dealt with in David J. LeRoy and Christopher H. Sterling (eds.), Mass News: Practices, Controversies and Alternatives (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

4. Later, the floor reporter Peter Kaye was brought in to replace the departed Robin MacNeil. Naturally, all of the comments, introductions and so forth were video-taped at the close of the daily hearings.

5. Estimates vary, but an NPACT press release of August 5, 1973, estimates the amount of money pledged due to Watergate coverage in the realm of $700,000.00.

6. The number was estimated by a former NPACT PR employee whose responsibility was the daily mail.

7. Gallup Opinion Index, September, 1973, Report No. 99.

8. Summary of the Nielsen Rating Data, 1973, for Public Broadcasting Service.

9. Corporation for Public Broadcasting Memo-Summary of Telephone Coincidental Rating in Seven Cities.

10. See John S. Reed, The Enduring South: Subcultural Persistence in Mass Society (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1972), pp. 15-17.

11. For readers unfamiliar with American television, the three commercial networks each carried the same pool-feed of the hearings during the first week or so. In some market areas then, day-time viewers could not avoid the coverage. The most vociferous reaction came with the preemption of serial melodramas--the afternoon soap operas--by the hearings. With rotation, one network would telecast the hearings, and the other networks carry their regular programs. The next day another network would carry the hearings, with the other two networks carrying their programming.

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12. See C. Edward Wotring, David J. LeRoy, and Gregg Phifer, "Watergate: Who's Watching the Hearings?" Public Telecommunication Review, Vol. 1, No. 1 (August, 1973), pp. 5-11.

13. Discussions of fused variables or indices are discussed in Morris Rosenberg The Logic of Survey Analysis (New York: Basic Books, 1968) and Earl R. Babbie, Survey Research Methods (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Books, 1973).

14. The notion of light or irregular viewers versus heavy or regular viewers categorized respondents by (1) light, if they watched once a week or less and (2) regular, twice a week or more. The marginals for the light viewers were quite small--less than a 100 for light commercial and light public television. Tabling two or three variables rapidly depleted the cells.

15. Wotring, et.al., p. 11.

16. Broadcasting, August 6, 1973, p. 29, entitles its story: "Watergate Remains a Good Draw." The point is that daytime telecasts obtained respectable ratings given the commercial competition.

17. The question "Why are you watching more PTV?" was branched to in a number of ways, with some of the interviewers skipping the question all together. In fairness, the question was asked consistently of those who reported viewing more PTV after declaring themselves PTV viewers. An estimate of how many new PTV viewers answered this question cannot be hazarded at this time.

18. When asked what public television intended to do to keep the new viewers attracted by the hearings, most officials (best left nameless) answered vaguely that they would do "something." Besides more of the same, mostly gavel-to-gavel coverage of hearings, confirmations, and so on, there seems to be precious little in the way of programming to appeal to these people.

19. S.H. Chaffee and J.M. McLeod, "Sensitization in Panel Design: A Coorientational Experiment," Journalism Quarterly, 1968, 45:661-69.

20. M.B. Hesse and S. H. Chaffee, "Coorientation in Political Communication: A Structural Analysis," paper presented to the International Communication Association, Montreal, April, 1973, p. 1. Also, c.f. American Behavioral Scientists, March-April, 1973.

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21. S.H. Chaffee and J.M. McLeod,"Communication as Coorientation: Two Studies," paper presented to Theory and Methodology Division, Association of Education in Journalism, Boulder, 1967, p. 7-8. Also, S.H. Chaffee, "The Interpersonal Context of Mass Communication," in F.G. Kline and P.J. Tichenor (eds.), Current Perspectives in Mass Communication Research, Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1972, p. 111-113.

22. Hesse and Chaffee, op.cit., p. 3.

23. Hesse and Chaffee, 1973, op. cit., p. 4, 10; Chaffee and McLeod, 1967, op. cit., p. 9.

24. Over the three waves of interviews, 64% of Democrat voters, as opposed to 47% Republican voters watched the Watergate hearings at least once on either commercial or public television. Thirty-one percent of the Democratic voters watched on public television as opposed to 21% to the Republican voters.

25. Since only voters were analyzed, the sample size dropped from 495 to 314.

26. Chaffee and McLeod, 1967, op. cit., p. 9.

27. Nixon's major speeches on August 15 and 22 in which he criticized the media for alleged bias occurred after this data had been collected.

28. Viewing the local news at 11:00 p.m. was thought to indicate a more information-oriented individual than one who watched at 6:00 p.m. This is supported by a significant correlation between viewing the hearings and watching the local news at 11:00 p.m. ($r=25$, $p<.001$).

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Table 1

PERCENT OF SAMPLE REPORTING VIEWING OF WATERGATE HEARINGS BY WAVES - FLORIDA SAMPLE

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
View None	52%	43%	34%
View Public Television	19	8	11
View Commercial Television	29	13	23
Viewed Once But No Longer		36	32
Total	100%	100%	100%
N= ( )	(770)	(201)	(495)

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Table 2

PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS VIEWING BEHAVIOR

BY AGE AND EDUCATION

	High School Under 40	High School Over 40	College Under 40	College Over 40
Never View	44%	37%	23%	28%
View Commercial	27	35	39	19
View PTV	29	29	38	53
	100%	100%	100%	100%
N= ( )	(112)	(167)	(129)	(96)

Table 3

PERCENT VIEWING HEARINGS, CONTROLLING FOR AGE AND EDUCATION -

WAVE THREE DATA

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	MALE				FEMALE			
	Under 40		Over 40		Under 40		Over 40	
	High School	College	High School	College	High School	College	High School	College
Never Viewing Hearings	36%	20%	33%	36%	47%	27%	39%	19%
Commercial Viewer	21	34	28	24	30	44	37	16
Public Television Viewer	43	46	38	39	22	29	25	64
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N= ( )	(33)	(65)	(49)	(33)	(76)	(22)	(46)	(42)

Table 4

SEX PERCENTED ON VIEWING CATEGORIES

FOR THE HEARINGS

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	Male	Female
Never View	30%	36%
Light Commercial*	9	9
Light Public	11	6
Regular Viewer Commercial *	19	23
Regular Viewer Public Television	31	25
TOTAL	100%	100%
N= ( )	(185)	(303)

* Light is defined as viewing once a week or less. Regular is twice a week or more.

Figure 1

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Diagram of Coorientation Concepts

RX - Republican opinions toward issue X

DX - Democrat opinions toward issue X

R(DX) - Republican estimates of Democrat opinion toward issue X

D(RX) - Democrat estimates of Republican opinion toward issue X

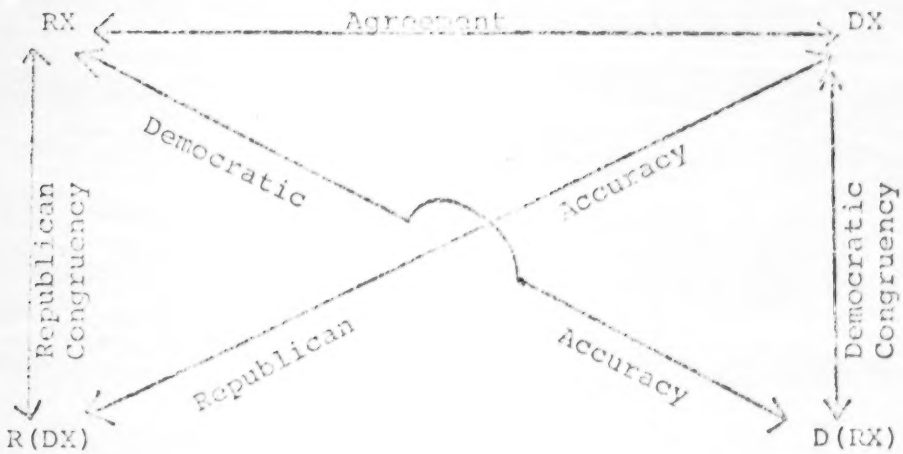

Table 5

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MEAN OWN OPINIONS AND ESTIMATES OF OTHER'S OPINIONS

BETWEEN REPUBLICAN AND DEMOCRATIC VOTERS

Advance Knowledge Issue

RX	DX
$\bar{x}$ = 2.67	$\bar{x}$ = 1.69
R(DX)	D(RX)
$\bar{x}$ = 2.03	$\bar{x}$ = 2.71
(n=180)	(n=134)

(A higher mean indicates the group felt Nixon had less extensive advanced knowledge.)

Media Bias Issue

RX	DX
$\bar{x}$ = 2.11	$\bar{x}$ = 1.62
R(DX)	D(RX)
$\bar{x}$ = 2.17	$\bar{x}$ = 2.72
(n=150)	(n=134)

(A higher mean indicates the group felt the media was more biased.)

Table 6

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RESULTS OF THE MIXED MODELS ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

FOR THE ADVANCED KNOWLEDGE ISSUE

AND THE MEDIA BIAS ISSUE

Advanced Knowledge Issue

Source	SS	df	ms	F	P
Total	979	627	--	--	--
Between Subjects	551	313	--	--	--
Conditions	0	1	0	0	NS
Error b	551	312	1.8	--	--
Within Subjects	428	314	--	--	--
Trials	4	1	4	4.44	< .05
Trials X conditions	132	1	132	146.67	< .001
Error W	292	312	0.9		

Meida Bias Issue

Source	SS	df	ms	F	P
Total	888	627	--	--	--
Between Subjects	545	313	--	--	--
Conditions	0	1	0	0	NS
Error b	545	312	1.7	--	--
Within Subjects	343	314	--	--	--
Trials	40	1	40	50	<.001
Trials X conditions	41	1	41	51	<.001
Error W	262	312	0.8		